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6 Ways Climate Change Will Affect Physical and Mental Health

A ruined planet cannot sustain human lives in good health



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We know [climate change](#) is real. From rising temperatures to rising sea levels, we can see it for ourselves. But what does this mean for the physical and mental health of humans? Will increased temperatures have a negative effect on the mind and body? Let's look at some ways climate change could have a disastrous effect on mind and body.

Extreme events

Extreme weather events including floods, wildfires, heatwaves, and droughts can cause significant [mental-health](#) problems for those

directly exposed, not to mention the obvious physical health consequences, such as heat stroke, dehydration, and physical injuries.

Weather events are becoming more frequent due to climate change, which means more people will experience the negative effects of these disasters on their mental health and well-being. The aftermath of an extreme weather event often [includes](#) trauma, grief, depression, and anxiety.

While most people experience these conditions in some way after a disaster or emergency, they typically last only weeks or months. People who

were vulnerable before the event, whether because of age or pre-existing mental health conditions, are more likely to suffer lasting mental-health problems after experiencing an extreme weather event.

Displaced populations

It's likely that climate change will cause more people to be [displaced](#) from their homes and lose the things that make up the foundation of life: families, friends, communities, and all the associated health-promoting elements, such as social connection, personal identity, and sense of control over one's life.

If you've ever moved away from your hometown, you can relate to these losses. But imagine moving hundreds or thousands of miles away due to a natural disaster or conflict over resources — with no idea if your previous home will ever be inhabitable again.

The stressors caused by this type of displacement can [contribute](#) to mental-health problems, such as trauma reactions, depression, and anxiety disorders. Displaced individuals are also at a higher [risk](#) for developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) because they've experienced violence or threats against themselves or others.

Economic losses

Think of the economy as a big chain. The links in a chain are strong only if each one is strong, and all the links work together to hold the chain together. If one link gets damaged, it can cause problems for the others. Climate change will affect many links that make up our [economy](#). Some parts of the economy, like tourism, will be hurt when rising temperatures prevent people from visiting parks, forests, beaches, and other destinations.

Industries such as agriculture might be helped by warmer weather at first, but climate change will make droughts more common (drier weather) and more severe (stronger winds during fires). Farmers need water to grow crops, so droughts

and fires can damage their crops or even destroy them completely. Hunger and nutritional deficiencies could become a problem because people can't afford the high cost of food or have limited availability.

When people lose their jobs because farmers lose money growing crops or tourists stay away from places they used to visit, it makes people feel bad. They don't have as much money and feel less safe because they think they might lose their job in the future, too. This means that the [economic impacts](#) of climate change are likely to negatively affect the mental health and well-being of thousands of people across the world.

Lengthier allergy seasons

Hay fever refers to allergic rhinitis, a condition in which you experience sneezing, coughing, and wheezing because of allergies. The average person thinks of seasonal allergies as hay fever. But there are also other types of allergies. One thing they all have in common: They make your immune system overreact to something harmless, like dust and pollen. And then there's asthma, the most common chronic disease of childhood. It can be caused or worsened by an allergy to pollen — the most [common allergen](#) in the United States today.

What does climate change have to do with pollen season? It may seem like “season” doesn't even apply anymore if spring arrives earlier every year. But climate change also brings longer dry seasons, which means more time for plants to release their [pollen](#) before rain clears the air again. Spring is arriving earlier and earlier each year (a trend called “season creep”). Longer dry seasons mean allergy sufferers get hit with more pollen early in the spring, but also later into fall than before. The result is that pollen season may increase by a few weeks.

Toxic algae blooms

[Toxic algae blooms](#) are an example of how climate change can affect mental health. These



blooms, also called [red tides](#), can cause stomach pain and vomiting if you consume them and respiratory symptoms if you breathe them. They can even force people to evacuate from their homes.

People who must evacuate their homes due to toxic algae blooms are psychologically affected in the short term by the evacuation itself. They may feel overwhelmed and disoriented, especially if the evacuation was forced because of a sudden water crisis caused by a broken pipe or machinery malfunction rather than a gradual one like rising sea levels would cause. While on the surface this may not seem like a mental-health issue, it's important to remember that stress from such situations can be long term and lead to anxiety and depression if left untreated.

Warmer temperatures

In addition to the physical hazards of [extreme heat](#) and heavy rainfall, rising temperatures can also have mental-health consequences. Many people already get cranky when it's hot, and

increased heat stress may lead to more people experiencing mental-health problems.

Warmer temperatures are associated with increased [aggression and violence](#). In cities where summers are already hot, such as Atlanta or Houston, this kind of rise could be disastrous. According to [Psychology Today](#), a temperature rise of 8 degrees F. can lead to over 80,000 violent assaults or murders yearly. In contrast, non-violent crimes don't appear to be affected by environmental temperature.

The bottom line: Climate change can affect mental health in many ways

As climate change continues to affect our planet, the [United Nations](#) has said it is one of the most significant health risks in this century. With rising temperatures and more severe weather events, climate change is changing mental-health outcomes in various ways. Be aware of these changes, so you'll know how to limit their effects on your health and well-being.